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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Program provides crisis counseling for disaster victims

by John DePerro

Mental Health Disaster Team

Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services

I imagine your locality slammed by a disaster. The presidential declaration has been made and your EOP is activated. You're swamped trying to coordinate a response when your county supervisor or mayor tells you to establish an "outreach program" for the victims. The boss wants a fully trained outreach worker sent to every home in the affected area to provide crisis counseling for victims.

You're told to hire a staff, have something up and running within 48 hours and plan for a year-long program that includes follow-up visits. Furthermore, you are to apply for federal grants to fully fund it. Sound impossible? Not at all! This is exactly what localities in North Carolina did following Hurricane Fran. Altogether, the state spent about \$2 million in grant money on mental health outreach programs for disaster victims.

Faced with the scenario above, you can turn to your local Community Service

Board (CSB) to set up an outreach program, prepare the grant requests and hire, train and supervise outreach workers. Virginia has 40 CSBs across the state which have been tasked under ESF 8 to provide outreach programs during a presidentially declared disaster.

It works like this: jurisdictions approved for Individual Assistance may receive "Crisis Counseling" grants under the Stafford Act, Section 416. These FEMA grants are routinely provided to the state mental health authority. In Virginia, the Department of Mental Health oversees the CSB outreach programs which can be delivered in the name of local government.

Disaster mental health outreach programs for the general population are not clinical. They are designed for "normal people responding normally to an abnormal situation." The outreach is psychological "first aid" — the counseling is short term and on site. Outreach workers are citizens hired from the affected community and are non credentialed. Much of their outreach involves



helping people cope.

The outreach workers are trained to avoid the use of mental health terms and labels so the service will be less intimidating. Records are not kept and people who may have serious problems are referred to the appropriate agency. Best of all, the outreach can be presented as a local government program, and the emergency manager can work with the CSB to tailor it to the specific needs of the affected community.

Unlike most states which have county mental health systems, Virginia has CSBs that generally service more than one jurisdiction. They are often quasi-governmental, nonprofit organizations which turn to the state mental health department for guidance. Because these entities don't clearly fall under state or local government, they may not be perceived as a resource by emergency managers.

These boards offer other invaluable services. Emergency managers can tap into the expertise of the CSB Executive Director and his or her staff to provide disaster mental health services. The CSB can assist with preparing a disaster mental (continued on page 2)

The psychology of a disaster

- ☐ No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it.
- ☐ Both individual and collective trauma occurs.
- ☐ Most people pull together and function during and after a disaster, but their effectiveness is diminished.
- ☐ Reestablishment of normal emotional support systems is critical to the recovery of the victim.
- ☐ Disaster-related stress and grief are normal responses to an abnormal situation.

- ☐ Disaster recovery assistance is often called a "second disaster" because the reality can never meet the expectations of the victim. The victim may end up rejecting disaster assistance of all types.
- ☐ Disaster victims go through predictable phases during and after a disaster: heroic → honeymoon → inventory → disillusion. Those who assist disaster victims must match their actions to the phase of the victim.
- ☐ Disaster victims will respond more positively if you are actively interested

and concerned.

- ☐ Disaster mental health assistance is generally more practical than psychological and must be tailored to the needs of the affected community.
- ☐ Most disaster victims don't perceive themselves as needing mental health services and will not seek out such a resource. Active outreach on the part of those who wish to provide such services is required.

Prepare to face the media with VDES course

When the next disaster hits your jurisdiction, you may find yourself in front of those hot media lights explaining what the heck is going on. Prepare yourself ahead of time to face the heat.

Either you or someone from your jurisdiction, who would be designated PIO during a disaster, will benefit greatly from the VDES "Basic Public

Information Course."

The class, from January 21-23 in Richmond, differs from the one-day workshop typically offered. Participants will receive far more detailed instruction on basic PIO skills. Media representatives from radio, TV and print will be available to answer questions and share their observations. Finally, a case study of a

recent disaster will be presented during which time a local public information officer will share lessons learned while dealing with the media.

In addition, this class is a prerequisite for EMI's Advanced Public Information Course in Emmitsburg.

"The course is geared for people who may not have a strong media or public

information background," said VDES Public Information Coordinator Janet Clements. "After this class, you will walk away with the skills you need to get the job done."

To register, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6580. Cutoff enrollment is 25 students. For more information about the course, call Janet Clements at 804/897-6510.

FEMA designs high-speed CD-ROM info package

Have you ever wished for a "Public Awareness and Preparedness Campaign In-A-Box," something you could pull out when you needed it?

Help is on the way. FEMA has created a CD-ROM titled "Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Library, 1997 Edition." It contains public awareness information on any kind of disaster you can imagine. Just about everything you need to build community outreach programs has been designed into this highly sophisticated

information package.

You'll find graphics, brochures, background information, disaster preparedness checklists and fact sheets on everything from terrorism to wildland fires.

Other offerings include a coloring book for kids, the FEMA "Good Ideas" book, the "Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry," and a whole lot more.

The material is printer-ready — if you want to spend the extra money — or you

can use your office equipment to put together good-looking public information material. The package includes a PC version for viewing and printing materials from a PC, and a Mac disk which can be taken to a professional printer for high-resolution, color publications.

FEMA has outdone itself in producing this cutting-edge, 21st century information product. To order your copy, call the VDES Public Information Office at 804/897-6510.

Disaster mental health

(continued from page 1)

health annex for the locality's EOP. They can even help group homes, run by private contractors, prepare the disaster plans that are one of the requirements for licensure.

Although many first responder organizations have highly effective Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) programs, such resources may not always be available to you, your staff, or other first responder groups. The CSBs can provide CISD to help these people cope with the destruction, injury and death they may witness.

Crisis counseling, whether for disaster victims or workers, can help defuse the great emotions that build up during and after a disaster. These programs can help people function in the weeks and months ahead.

For more information, call John DePerry at 804/371-0306.

Crisis Communication tips

What's the best public information strategy during a crisis? In a recent issue of *Emergency Preparedness News*, Editor Michael Berkowitz offered some tips gleaned from a workshop he attended at the NEMA annual conference in Boston.

The following are lessons learned from past crisis communication successes and failures. They can be applied whether or not a Joint Information Center is established:

- ✍ If emergency officials have time during an incident, they should "brief up" all of the involved players prior to the media briefings. This ensures that players don't learn facts about the response during the media briefing itself and better prepares them to answer questions from the media.
- ✍ Making sure your PIO or other staff members prepare a packet of background information for the press is extremely helpful, particularly for technical incidents

such as nuclear accidents or ones involving hazardous materials. If the media have this information, they won't waste time asking routine questions and emergency officials will have better success in getting important messages out to the public.

- ✍ In your exercises, include PIOs from the various agencies and the private industries in your locality. This way, they get to know each other before the crisis and can build valuable networks that will pay off for you during an emergency.

- ✍ Invite local media to see your operations before a crisis. You'll get to know them and you'll have a chance to build credibility. Invite select media members to serve as evaluators of your drills.

- ✍ Treat all media equally. Don't cater to national media over your local press. The local media can be much more valuable assets during most incidents.

HAZ MAT



Program serves as model

Prompted by the Oklahoma City bombing and Presidential Decision Directive 39, in 1995, VDES began to develop a terrorism program by building upon its nationally recognized state hazmat program. In the two years since its inception, the VDES Terrorism Consequence Management program has grown dramatically.

“Most terrorist incidents involve hazardous materials and most terrorist weapons fit into existing categories of hazardous materials,” said Brett Burdick, VDES terrorism program manager. “Because our agency has the expertise in hazmat training and in coordinating resources to local government during disasters, we have been designated the lead agency for Consequence Management in a terrorist incident. When we designed our program — rather than reinvent the wheel — we tried to use existing capabilities as much as possible.”

Over two years, the agency has received about \$69,000 in federal money to develop the program. In the first year, four seminars were held across the state for senior local government officials that provided basic information and raised awareness of the issues related to terrorism.

Agency staff, working in close conjunction with several local hazmat coordinators, developed the *Public Safety Response to Terrorism* course and assisted the National Fire Academy in developing the *Emergency Response to Terrorism* class. The first is geared to responders who would be first on the scene of a terrorist incident and concentrates on basic awareness. The second covers awareness and touches on the operations aspects of a terrorist incident.

Recently, the VDES Tech Haz Division piloted their latest terrorism course. Titled *Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Management Considerations*, the class is geared to on-scene Incident Commanders and others who may be in charge of a portion of the incident. Participants deal with the whole picture — resource control, legal authority and state and federal agency coordination — and are encouraged to think strategically rather than operationally.

Based on class evaluations, this pilot course is now being modified and will be ready for delivery at the beginning of the coming year. “We ask the localities what they want,” said Burdick. “With the feedback we receive, we can tailor these courses to meet the needs of the jurisdiction.”

When putting together a terrorist program, Burdick observed, “The most important first steps are to train those who are first on scene to be able to recognize the incident and report it. You’ve got to identify everything you might need to do in the response phase before outside assets arrive. This ‘laundry list’ should be compared to your current capabilities so that you can figure out the most effective way to use your existing resources.”

For more information, call Brett Burdick at 804/897-6569.

Changes at VDES

After 18 years as the VDES IFLOWS guru, IFLOWS Program Manager Stan Campbell has retired. Hired in March of 1979 to run the program, Campbell has played a major role in its growth. “The program was developed back in the late ‘70s, when coal mining was booming in the Appalachian region,” said Campbell. “People were moving there for the jobs and they were putting up homes and mobile homes in the hollows. Every time it rained, they were getting flooded.”

The Appalachian Regional Commission requested assistance from the NWS to develop a flash flood warning system that could alert people of a possible flash flood event. The result was IFLOWS, a computerized warning system that uses computer, radio and gage sensing technology to provide the earliest possible warnings to the NWS and local and state emergency managers. NWS chose three pilot states — Kentucky, West Virginia and Virginia — to test the new technology.

“The first system in the country was operational in 1981 in Dickenson County, followed by Buchanan and then Wise,” said Campbell. “After the ‘85 floods, everyone in the Roanoke and Shenandoah Valleys became interested and wanted to participate in the program.” Since that time, IFLOWS technology has come a long way. With the current software and hardware, an enormous amount of information can be input into the program. Using NWS historical weather information and input from the IFLOWS rain gages, warnings can be tailored to cover a range of weather conditions in specifically defined areas.

“The best thing that happened to emergency services was the IFLOWS program,” said Campbell. “When we first started putting the system in, people would hardly touch the computers. It took a lot of patience and time to get people to accept the technology.” He added, “Over the years, I’ve received a lot of support at the local level. I’ve learned a lot and I know the people I’ve worked with have learned a lot. The IFLOWS is an outstanding program and I would love to see it continue in Virginia.”

Steve Patrick, former Hazardous Materials Officer for the Northern Virginia area, left in September for the FBI Academy at Marine Corps Base Quantico. Patrick is serving as program manager for the agency’s hazmat response unit and is developing emergency response and training for FBI national and international response teams.

Along with others, Patrick played an integral part in developing Virginia’s terrorism consequence management program. States across the country have used it as a model for their own terrorism programs.

He noted the evolution of hazmat in Virginia and commented, “The biggest change I’ve seen is the greater emphasis placed on response to technological hazards. This includes not only hazardous materials emergencies, but environmental crimes, nuclear power plant emergencies and terrorism. These days, response encompasses a broad range of technological hazards.”

He continued, “I’ve been very fortunate to have been part of the Tech Haz team. Our regional response team program has served as a model for national and international response.”

TRAINING



Introduction to Emergency Management

November 5-7
Salem

Disaster Response and Recovery Operations

November 18-20
Williamsburg

Coordinator's Briefing

December 4-5
Richmond

PDS Leadership and Influence

December 9-10
Region II, Location TBD

Decision Making and Problem Solving

December 11
Region II, Location TBD

EOC Management and Operations

December 15-17
Region III, Location TBD

Elected Official's Briefing

December 18
Richmond
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6580

Technological Hazards Division

Advanced Hazardous Materials Control

November 10-14
Martinsville

Chemistry of Hazardous Materials

December 1-12
Virginia Beach

Hazardous Materials Incident Management

February 6-8, 1998
Location TBD
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/897-6573

Search and Rescue

GSAR Institute

November 14-16 (Part I)
December 12-14 (Part II)
Front Royal
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

Conferences

EPA Region III Chemical Emergency Preparedness & Prevention Conference

December 2-5
Pittsburgh, Penn.
For information, call Al Brown at 215/566-3302

Virginia Emergency Management Conference

February 11-13, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Chris Eudailey at 540/582-7095

Sites of interest

For information on disaster mental health issues, go to the web site created by the Department of Mental Health and James Madison University's Psychology Department. Titled "The Virginia Disaster Stress Intervention Web Site," it contains a mission statement, a special needs site that includes the draft plan being developed by the Peninsula Special Needs Disaster Committee, a list of key players in disaster stress intervention, information on the role CSBs play in a disaster and more. As the site grows, new features will be added. Visit <http://www.jmu.edu/psychologydept/vdishome.htm>

FEMA unveiled their new web site for kids in October. It contains interactive games, student artwork, activities and cutting-edge graphics — all delivering the serious message of disaster preparedness and mitigation packaged in a way kids can relate to. Check out <http://www.fema.gov/kids>

"1997 Emergency Management Gold" is a site created by an emergency manager for emergency managers. Some features include a link to updates on national legislation related to emergency management, an "Information and Jobs" page, listings of relevant online chat sessions, a virtual library and other nice stuff. Try <http://www.disasters.org/emgold>

This web site is a "for your information" experience. It's maintained by the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC), the state of Hawaii and the U.S. Department of Defense. This high-tech organization opened for business in 1996, four years after Hurricane Iniki devastated the island of Kauai. If you visit the PDC History link and click on "PDC Background" and "Concept of Operations," you'll get a dazzling picture of a possible future for emergency management. PDC's technology goes beyond cutting edge — the center uses the world's most advanced earth monitoring satellites and computing systems to collect their information. Go to <http://www.pdc.org>



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